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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Thursday, Aug. 25, 2011
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Black Hills Forest Initiative, by Gov. Dennis Daugaard

For many years and many people, the Black Hills is a special place. To experience it, with its clear streams, dark hills and fragrant ponderosa pine, millions of people from around the world come every year. What we sometimes take for granted, those visitors embrace as the trip of a lifetime.

Today, the faces of Crazy Horse and our great presidents at Mount Rushmore look out over the hills and see they are threatened. More than *one-third* of the Black Hills National Forest – over 400,000 acres – has been infested by mountain pine beetles, and the outbreak shows no sign of relenting.

We can see the devastation throughout the Black Hills, and residents have been feeling the effects for years. Hundreds of businesses and thousands of employees in the logging, forest products and tourism industries depend on a healthy, well-managed forest for their livelihoods. The current beetle infestation threatens those business owners as well as their employees and families. It also threatens to damage the very nature and character of the Black Hills.

The millions of dead trees killed by mountain pine beetles provide an environment where catastrophic wildfires could spread rapidly, causing severe risk to life and property. Unless bold, well-coordinated efforts are undertaken soon, the mountain pine beetle epidemic will cause irreparable losses to the Black Hills.

To mitigate damage from the continuing beetle infestation, South Dakota is implementing the Black Hills Forest Initiative. The effort involves leveraging federal, state, and private resources to help address this serious problem – with South Dakota leading by example. We will not wait for the fire to rage before mobilizing our response.

Action is needed, and I pledge to invest \$1 million each year for the next three years to help control the spread of this pest. In addition, South Dakota state government will collaborate with the Black Hills National Forest on grant applications to secure additional funding, coordinate with local partners on control activities, and increase our education and messaging efforts. For mountain pine beetle-related information, visit our new website, WWW.BEATTHEBEETLES.COM.

The mountain pine beetle epidemic is an emergency situation – a disaster we can see coming. Just as South Dakota's early and urgent action reduced and avoided some of the damage threatened by Missouri River flooding, we can reduce the very real potential for large wildfires

in the Black Hills. But leadership and decisive action are needed. The Black Hills Forest Initiative marks the beginning of that action.

We know that South Dakota's efforts will not completely eradicate mountain pine beetles from the Black Hills, but if we can reduce the potential for property damage and loss of life during a wildfire, then our time, efforts and resources are well-spent. There is no question in my mind that the forest lands of the Black Hills are a resource worth fighting for.